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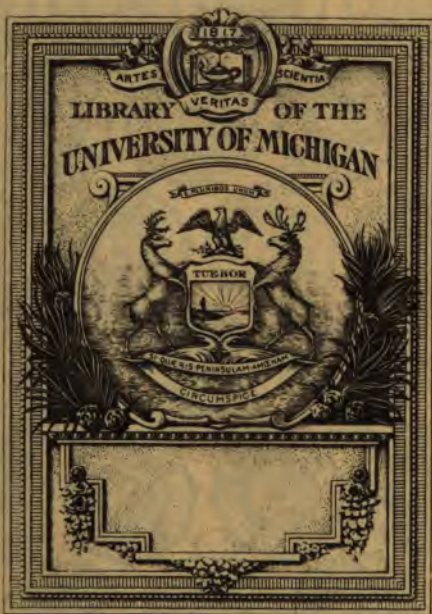
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Third Edition revised

NEW YEAR'S DAY

I

A

NEW YEAR'S DAY

BASIL

SANDY

BRIAN

BRIAN

THIS trade that we ply with the pen,
Unworthy of heroes or men,
Assorts ever less with my humour :
Mere tongues in the raiment of rumour,
We review and report and invent :
In drivell our virtue is spent.

BASIL

From the muted tread of the feet,
And the slackening wheels, I know

The air is hung with snow,
And carpeted the street.

BRIAN

Ambition, and passion, and power
Come out of the north and the west,
Every year, every day, every hour,
Into Fleet Street to fashion their best :
They would shape what is noble and wise ;
They must live by a traffic in lies.

BASIL

Sweet rivers of living blood
Poured into an ocean of mud.

BRIAN

Newspapers flap o'er the land,
And darken the face of the sky ;

A covey of dragons, wide-vanned,
Circle-wise clanging, they fly.
No nightingale sings ; overhead
The lark never mounts to the sun ;
Beauty and truth are dead,
And the end of the world begun.

BASIL

Far away in a valley of peace,
Swaddled in emerald,
The snow-happed primroses
Tarry till spring has called.

SANDY

And here where the Fleet once tripped
In its ditch to the drumlie Thames,
We journalists, haughty though hipped,
Are calling our calling names.

BRIAN

But you know, as I know, that our craft
Is the meanest in act and intention ;
You know that the Time-spirit laughed
In his sleeve at the Dutchman's invention :
Old Coster of Haarlem, I mean,
Whose print was the first ever seen.

BASIL

I can hear in that valley of mine,
Loud-voiced on a leafless spray,
How the robin sings, flushed with his holly wife,
Of the moonlight blossoms of May.

BRIAN

These dragons that hide the sun !
The serpents flying and fiery,

That knotted a nation in one
Written mass : the scaley and wirey,
And flame breathing terror the saint
Still slays on our coins ; the thing
That wandering artists paint
Where creaking sign-boards swing ;
Gargouille, famous in France
That the fire at Rouen slew ;
The dragon, Petrarca's lance
In Laura's defence overthrew ;
The sea-beast Perseus killed ;
Proserpine's triple team ;
Tarasque whose blood was spilled
In Rhone's empurpled stream ;
For far-flying strength and ire
And venom might never withstand
The least of the flourishing quire
In Fleet Street stalled and the Strand.

BASIL

Through the opening gate of the year
Sunbeams and snowdrops peer.

BRIAN

Fed by us here and groomed
In this pestilent reeking sty,
These dragons I say have doomed
Religion and poetry.

SANDY

They may doom till the moon forsakes
Her dark, star-daisied lawn ;
They may doom till doomsday breaks
With angels to trumpet the dawn ;
While love enchants the young,
And the old have sorrow and care,

No song shall be unsung,
Unprayed no prayer.

BRIAN

Leaving the dragons alone—
I say what the prophet says—
The tyrant on the throne
Is the morning and evening press.
In all the land his spies,
A little folk but strong,
A second plague of flies,
Buzz of the right and the wrong ;
Swarm in our ears and our eyes—
News and scandal and lies.
(Men stand upon the brink
Of a precipice every day ;
A drop of printer's ink
Their poise may outweigh ;

So they think what the papers think,
And do as the papers say.
Who reads the daily press,
His soul's lost here and now;
Who writes for it is less
Than the beast that tugs a plough.)

BASIL

Round happy household fires
I hear sweet voices sing ;
And the lamb's-wool of our sires,
Spiced ale, is a draught for a king.

SANDY

Now, journalist, perpend.
You soil your bread and butter :
Shall guttersnipes pretend
To satirise the gutter ?

Are parsons ever seen
To butt against the steeple?
Brian, I fear you've been
With very superior people.
We, the valour and brains of the age,
The brilliant, adventurous souls,
No longer in berserkir rage—

BRIAN

Spare us the berserkir rage!

SANDY

Not I; the phrase outrolls
As freshly to me this hour,
As when on my boyish sense
It struck like a trumpet-blare.
You may cringe and cower
To critical pretence;

If people will go bare
They may count on bloody backs ;
Cold are the hearts that care
If a girl be blue-eyed or black-eyed ;
Only to souls of hacks
Are phrases hackneyed.—
When the damsel had her bower,
And the lady kept her state,
The splendour and the power
That made adventure great,
Were not more strong and splendid
Than the subtle might we wield ;
Though chivalry be ended,
There are champions in the field.
Nor are we warriors giftless ;
Deep magic's in our stroke ;
Ours are the shoes of swiftness :
And ours the darkling cloak ;

We fear no golden charmer ;
We dread no form of words ;
We wear enchanted armour ;
We wield enchanted swords.
To us the hour belongs ;
Our daily victory is
O'er hydras, giant wrongs,
And dwarf iniquities.
We also may behold,
Before our boys are old,
When time shall have unfurled
His heavy hanging mists,
How the future of the world
Was shaped by journalists.

BASIL

Sing hey for the journalist !
He is your true soldado ;

Both time and chance he'll lead a dance,
And find out Eldorado.

BRIAN

Sing hey for Eldorado !

BASIL

A catch, a catch, we'll trowl !

BRIAN

Sing hey for Eldorado !

SANDY

And bring a mazer-bowl,
With ale a-frothing brimmed.

BRIAN

We may not rest without it.

SANDY

With dainty ribbons trimmed,
And love-birds carved about it.

BASIL

With roasted apples scented,
And spiced with cloves and mace.

BRIAN

Praise him who ale invented !

SANDY

In heaven he has a place !

BASIL

Such a camarado
Heaven's hostel never missed !

BRIAN

Sing hey for Eldorado !

SANDY

Sing ho for the journalist !

BASIL

We drink them and we sing them
In mighty humming ale.

BRIAN

May fate together bring them !

SANDY

Amen !

BASIL

Wass hael !

BRIAN

Drinc hael !

ST VALENTINE'S EVE

I

B

12.12

ST VALENTINE'S EVE

MENZIES

PERCY

PERCY

A-MOPING always, journalist? For shame !
Though this be Lent no journalist need mope :
The blazing Candlemas was foul and wet ;
We shall be happy yet :
Sweethearts and crocuses together ope.

MENZIES

Assail, console me not in jest or trope :
Give me your golden silence ; or if speech
Must wake a ripple on the stagnant gloom
Of this lamp-darkened room,
Speak blasphemy, and let the mandrake screech.

PERCY

Dread words—'tis Ercles' vein—and fit to teach
The mandrake's self new ecstasies of woe,
Have passed my lips in blame of God and man.
Now surely nothing can
Constrain my soul serene to riot so.

MENZIES

But you are old ; the tide of life is low ;
No wind can raise a tempest in a cup :
Easy it is for withered nerves and veins,
Parched hearts and barren brains
To be serene and give life's question up.

PERCY

Although no longer chamber-doors I dup
For willing maids (that never conquered me) ;

Though unimpassioned be my tranquil mind,
And all my force declined,
My quenchless soul confronts its destiny.—
But tell me now what ghastly misery
Peeps from the shadowy cupboard of your eye?
This chastened month in white and gold is
dressed,
Lilies and snowdrops blessed :
Be shriven by me as you were now to die ;
Shrove-tide is come.

MENZIES

Confessions purify.
My skeletons I will uncupboard straight ;
And if you think me pitiful and weak,
I pray you do not speak,
But go and leave me lonely with my fate.—
My daily toil has irked me much of late :

Of books that never will be read I write
 What, save the anxious authors no one reads,
 And chronicle the deeds
Of Fashion, Crime, and Council, day and night.
Once in a quarter when my heart is light

I write a poem in a weekly sheet,
 To lie in clubs on tables crowned with baize,
 Immortal for seven days :
This is the life my echoing years repeat.

PERCY

The very round my aged steps still beat !

MENZIES

And brooding thus on my ephemeral flowers
 That smoulder in the wilderness, I thought,
 By envy sore distraught,

Of amaranths that burn in lordly bowers,
Of men divinely blessed with leisured hours,

And all the savage in my blood was roused.

I cursed the father who begot me poor,

The patient womb that bore

Me, last of ten, ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed ;

I cursed the barren common where I browsed

And sickened on the arid mental fare

The state has sown broad-cast ; I cursed the
strain

Whence sprang my blood and brain

Frugal and dry ; I cursed myself the heir

Of dreadful things that met me everywhere :

Of uncouth nauseous vennels, smoky skies ;

A chill and watery clime ; a thrifty race,

Using all means of grace

To save their souls and purses ; lingering lies,
Remnants of creeds and tags of party cries—

Scarecrows and rattles ; then I cursed this flesh,
Which must be daily served with meat and
drink,

Which will not let me think,
But holds me prisoner in the sexual mesh ;
I cursed all being, and began afresh—

My education and my geniture,
Which keep me running always from the goal,
Or stranded on Time's shoal—

In naked speech, a sixpenny reviewer,
A hungry parasite of literature.

PERCY

No reasoning can meet so fierce a mood.
I'll tell you of a journalist instead,

These many winters dead,
Who out of evil could distil the good.
He found his lot untameable and rude,
And sometimes ate what beggars had disdained
Left at the donor's door. Once on a time
A wanton youthful rhyme
I read him with my tears and heart's blood
stained,
Wherein of Fate I bitterly complained.
He praised my rhymes; then said, 'The Poet's
name
Is overhallowed; and the Statesman's praise
Unearned; unearned the bays
That crown the Warrior; Beauty, Art, I blame
For love alone deserves the meed of fame.'

MENZIES

I understand you not.

PERCY

Be still and mark.

'And so,' he said, 'though I am faint and old,
High in my garret cold—

While on the pane Death's knuckles rattle stark,
And hungry pangs keep sleep off—in the dark,

'I think how brides and bridegrooms, many a
pair,

With human sanction, or all unavouched,
Together softly couched,

Wonder and throb in rapture; how the care
Of ways and means, the thought of whitening
hair,

'Of trenchant wrinkles fade when night has set,
And many a long-wed man and woman find
The deepest peace of mind,

Sweet and mysterious to each other yet.

I think that I am still in Nature's debt,

' Scorned, disappointed, starving, bankrupt, old,

Because I loved a lady in my youth,

And was beloved in sooth.

I think that all the horrors ever told

Of tonsured men and women sable-stoled,

' Of long-drawn tortures wrought with subtle

zest,

Of war and massacre and martyrdom,

Of slaves in Pagan Rome—

In Christian England, who begin to test

The purpose of their state, to strike for rest

' And time to feel alive in : all the blight

Of pain, age, madness, ravished innocence,

Despair and impotence,

The lofty anguish that affronts the light,
And seems to fill the past with utter night,
'Is but Love's needful shadow: though the poles,
 The spangled zodiac, and the stars that beat
 In heaven's high Watling Street
Their myriad rounds ; though every orb that rolls
Lighting or lit, were filled with tortured souls,
'If one man and one woman, heart and brain
 Entranced above all fear, above all doubt
 Might wring their essence out,
The groaning of a universe in pain
Were as an undersong in Love's refrain.
'Then in a vision holy Time I see
 As one sweet bridal night, Earth softly spread
 One fragrant bridal bed,
And all my unrest leaves me utterly :
I sometimes feel almost that God may be.'

MENZIES

You touch me not. I, stretched upon the rack
Of consciousness, still curse. Woman and love ?
I would be throned above
Humanity. Yet were I God, alack !
I think that I should want my manhood back,
Hating and loving limits—

PERCY

Ah ! I know

How ill you are. You shall to-morrow do
What I now order you.
At early dawn through London you must go
Until you come where long black hedgerows grow,
With pink buds pearled, with here and there a tree,
And gates and stiles ; and watch good country
folk ;

And scent the spicy smoke
Of withered weeds that burn where gardens be ;
And in a ditch perhaps a primrose see.

The rooks shall stalk the plough, larks mount the
skies,

Blackbirds and speckled thrushes sing aloud,
Hid in the warm white cloud
Mantling the thorn, and far away shall rise
The milky low of cows and farmyard cries.

From windy heavens the climbing sun shall shine,
And February greet you like a maid
In russet-cloak arrayed ;
And you shall take her for your mistress fine,
And pluck a crocus for her valentine.

MENZIES

In russet-cloak arrayed with homespun smock

And apple cheeks.

PERCY

I pray you do not mock.

MENZIES

I mock not, I shall see earth and be glad :

London's a darksome cell where men go mad.

GOOD-FRIDAY

1

c

GOOD-FRIDAY

BASIL

SANDY

BRIAN

MENZIES

SANDY

PFFF ! journalists ; the wind blows snell !

BRIAN

To-day, we freeze, to-morrow fry.

BASIL

And yesterday the black rain fell

In sheets from London's smoky sky,

Like water through a dirty sieve.

MENZIES

March many weathers, as they say,
In country nooks where proverbs live,
And folk distinguish night from day.

SANDY

Well, we shall make a day of night :
Behold with *gules* and *or* a fire
Emblazoned, and a mellow light ;
And things that journalists require.

So let us open out our lore,
And chat as snugly as the dead ;
And damned be those who came before,
And all our brilliant sayings said.

BRIAN

I love not brilliance ; give me words
Of meadow-growth and garden plot,

Of larks and blackcaps ; gaudy birds,
Gay flowers and jewels like me not.

BASIL

The age-end journalist it seems
Can change his spots and turn his dress,
For you are he whose copy teems
With paradox and preciousness.

BRIAN

Last night I watched the evening star
Outshine the moon it so excelled ;
And since my thought has been afar
With deep and simple things of eld.

I heard in Fleet Street all the day,
While traffic rolled and bells were rung,
The sombre, wailing Tenebræ,
The Sistine Miserere sung.

I saw great people make their Maunds ;

 The prelate leave his lofty seat ;

A kaiser break imperial bonds

 To serve the poor and wash their feet.

I saw where countless hearts besought

 Pardon, for heaven's sweet peace athirst ;

And through my soul the tender thought

 Of Mary, Virgin-mother pierced.

I saw a city kneeling down,

 I saw the gonfanon unfurled,

I saw the Pope in triple crown

 Stand up for God and bless the world.

Templars I saw, and monks and nuns,

 I saw frail priests strong kings command ;

I thought how great the world was once

 When Heaven and Hell were close at hand.

The gloaming came ; I ceased to ache,
For in my veins the springtime welled,
And soothed my fancy to forsake
The deep and simple things of eld,
And fly away where blackbirds sing,
To wander free in dale and down.

BASIL

I would that I could see the spring !

SANDY

Has any one been out of town ?

MENZIES

I have for weeks.

BASIL

For weeks? By heaven!

What deeds heroic have you wrought

That such a foretaste should be given
Of Paradise?

MENZIES

I earned it not

'Twas accident: nor did I know

Till now, that when they come to die
Good press-men to the country go.

BRIAN

I think it's true.

SANDY

And so do I.

Heaven is to tread unpaven ground,
And care no more for prose or rhyme.
Dear Menzies, talk of sight and sound,
And make us feel the blossom-time.

MENZIES

Then let my fancy dive and hale
 Pearls from my wandering memory,
Unstrung, unsorted, else I fail
 To see the spring and make you see.

Already round the oak at eve
 Good people prate of gain and loss ;
With folded hands some sit and grieve—
 New mounds the green churchyard emboss.

The osier-peelers—ragged bands—
 In osier-holts their business ply ;
Like strokes of silver willow-wands
 On river banks a-bleaching lie.

The patchwork sunshine nets the lea ;
 The fitting shadows halt and pass ;

Forlorn, the mossy humble-bee
Lounges along the flowerless grass.

With unseen smoke as pure as dew,
Sweeter than love or lovers are,
Wood-violets of watchet hue
Their secret hearths betray afar.

The vanguards of the daisies come,
Summer's crusaders sanguine-stained,
The only flowers that left their home
When happiness in Eden reigned.

They strayed abroad, old writers tell,
Hardy and bold, east, west, south, north :
Our guilty parents, when they fell,
And flaming vengeance drove them forth,

Their haggard eyes in vain to God,
To all the stars of heaven turned;

But when they saw where in the sod,
The golden-hearted daisies burned,

Sweet thoughts that still within them dwelt
Awoke, and tears embalmed their smart;
On Eden's daisies couched they felt
They carried Eden in their heart.

BASIL

Oh, little flower so sweet and dear !

SANDY

Oh, humanest of flowers that grow !

BRIAN

Oh, little brave adventurer !
We human beings love you so !

MENZIES

We human beings love it so !
And when a maiden's dainty shoe
Can cover nine, the gossips know
The fulness of the Spring is due.

BRIAN

The gallant flower !

SANDY

Its health ! Come, drink !

MENZIES

Its health ! By heaven, in Highland style !

BASIL

The daisy's health ! And now, we'll think
Of Eden silently a while.

ST SWITHIN'S DAY

ST SWITHIN'S DAY

BASIL

SANDY

BRIAN

MENZIES

BASIL

WE four—since Easter-time we have not met.

BRIAN

And now the Dog Days bake us in our rooms
Like heretics in Dis's lidded tombs.

SANDY

Oh, for a little wind, a little wet !

BRIAN

A little wet, but not from heaven, I pray !
Have you forgotten 'tis St Swithin's Day ?

BASIL

Cast books aside, strew paper, drop the pen !
Bring ice, bring lemons, bring St Julien !

SANDY

Bring garlands !

BRIAN

With the laurel, lest it fade,
Let Bacchus twist vine-leaf and cabbage blade !

BASIL

I would I lay beside a brook at morn,
And watched the shepherd's-clock declare the
hours ;
And heard the husky whisper of the corn,
Legions of bees in leagues of summer flowers.

BRIAN

Who has been out of London ?

BASIL

Once, in June

Upstream I went to hear the summer tune

The birds sing at Long Ditton in a vale

Sacred to him who wrote his own heart's tale.

Of singing birds that hollow is the haunt :

Never was such a place for singing in !

The valley overflows with song and chaunt,

And brimming echoes spill the pleasant din.

High in the oak-trees where the fresh leaves sprout,

The blackbirds with their oboe voices make

The sweetest broken music all about

The beauty of the day for beauty's sake,

The wanton shadow and the languid cloud,

The grass-green velvet where the daisies crowd ;

I

D

And all about the air that softly comes
Thridding the hedgerows with its noiseless feet,
The purling waves with muffled elfin drums,
That step along their pebble-paven street ;
And all about the mates whose love they won,
And all about the sunlight and the sun.
The thrushes into song more bravely launch
Than thrushes do in any other dell ;
Warblers and willow-wrens on every branch,
Each hidden by a leaf, their rapture tell ;
Green-finches in the elms sweet nothings say,
Busy with love from dawn to dusk are they.
A passionate nightingale adown the lane
Shakes with the force and volume of his song
A hawthorn's heaving foliage ; such a strain,
Self-caged like him to make his singing strong,
Some poet may have made in days of yore,
Untold, unwritten, lost for evermore.

SANDY

Your holiday was of a rarer mood,
A dedication loftier than mine ;
But yet I swear my holiday was good :
I went to Glasgow just for auld lang syne.
In Sauchiehall Street in the afternoon
I saw a lady walking all in black,
But on her head a hat shaped like the moon,
Crescent and white and clouded with a veil.
I could not see if she were fair or pale
Because her beauty hid her like a mist :
But well I knew her bosom from her back ;
And all her delicacy well I wist :
And every boy and man that saw her pass
Adored the beauty of that Scottish lass.
I said within : 'Three things are worthiest know-
ing,

And when I know them nothing else I know.
I know unboundedly, what needs no showing,
That women are most beautiful ; and then
I know I love them ; and I know again
Herein alone true Science lies, for, lo !
Old Rome's a ruin ; Cæsar is a name ;
The Church ?—alas ! a lifeboat, warped and sunk ;
God, a disputed title : but the fame
Of those who sang of love, fresher than spring,
Blossoms for ever with the tree of life,
Whose boughs are generations ; and its trunk
Love ; and its flowers, lovers.

BRIAN

Love we sing,
Towards Love we strive ; no other song or strife
We know, or heed.—You, Menzies, what say you ?
Dark, in your corner—with a volume too !

MENZIES

Now that I hang above the loathesome hell
Of smouldering spite and foul disparagement,
Even as a Christian, singed and basted well
By Christians, hung in dreadful discontent
Chained to a beam, and dangling in the fire ;
And like an ocean-searching sailor-wight
Whose lonely eyes and clinging fingers tire ;
And like a desperate, pallid acolyte
Of giddy Fortune, who with straining clutch
Swings in her wheel's wind from its lower rim,
Doubting of all things, disbelieving much,
I come to him who sang the heavenly hymn.

BRIAN

To Colin Clout ! But whence this desperate
thought ?

MENZIES

Two months ago I published—

BRIAN

(Out ! Alack !)

MENZIES

A book that held the essence of my life ;
Wrong praise and wrong abuse was all I got.

BASIL

We all have suffered from the critic's knife.

SANDY

And helpless lain on many a weekly rack.

MENZIES

But I am weak.

BASIL

No, Menzies ; you are strong.
Already you have cast aside the wrong,
And solace found in Spenser's noble song.
When I was in like case it took a year
Before my wounds were whole, my vision clear.

MENZIES

What brought you to yourself?

BASIL

I prayed.

MENZIES

Indeed !

BRIAN

To whom ?

BASIL

I know not ; 'tis the mood I need—
 Submissive aspiration.

MENZIES

Pray with us :

Here from the city's centre make appeal.

BRIAN

Where hawkers cry, where roar the cab and 'bus.

BASIL

So be it. On your knees, then : Sandy, kneel,—
 Sweet powers of righteousness protect us now !
 Your adversary, Fate, has driven us down
 From that green-crowned, sun-fronting moun-
 tain-brow,
 Where peace and aspiration (ebb and flow
 Of thought that strives to whelm the infinite ;

And, as the sun for ever fails to drown
More than a little hollow of the night,
Pierces a rush-light's ray's length into it)
Swung our ecstatic spirits to and fro
Between the Heaven and Hades of delight,
Down to that Bedlam of the universe,
That sepulchre of souls for ever yawning,
That jug of asps—God's enemy, Time's hearse,
The world, that blister raised by every dawning.
Help, ere it drive us mad, this devil's din !
The clash of iron, and the clink of gold ;
The quack's, the beggar's whining manifold ;
The harlot's whisper, tempting men to sin ;
The voice of priests who damn each other's
missions ;
The babel-tongues of foolish politicians,
Who shout around a swaying Government ;
The groans of beasts of burden, mostly men,

Who toil to please a thankless upper ten ;
The knowledge-monger's cry, 'A brand-new
fact !'
The dog's hushed howl from whom the fact was
rent ;
The still-voice ' Culture ' ; and the slogan ' Act ! '
Save us from madness ; keep us night and day,
Sweet powers of righteousness to whom we pray.

MICHAELMAS

MICHAELMAS

BASIL HERBERT BRIAN SANDY MENZIES

HERBERT

The farmer roasts his stubble goose.

MENZIES

The pard and tiger moths are loose.

SANDY

The broom-pods crackle in the sun ;
And since the flowers are nearly done,
From thymy slopes and heather hills,
The wearied bee his pocket fills.

BRIAN

The wearied bee !

HERBERT

On ancient walls

The moss turns greener.

SANDY

Hark ! St Paul's

Booms midnight.

BRIAN

Basil is asleep.

SANDY

Boom, iron tongue ! boom, slow and deep !

MENZIES

The berries on the hawthorn tree

Are red as blood.

BRIAN

The wearied bee !

HERBERT

In Devon cider-presses flow,
And lads and lasses nutting go.

BASIL

Twelve notes the bell-voiced midnight peeled ;
The moon stood still ; the wan stars reeled.

BRIAN

Lord ! Basil, are you off your head ?

BASIL

The opening knell had awakened me ;
The twelve rang out a lullaby.

BRIAN

What passion's this ? whose mare is dead ?

SANDY

Fie, Brian ! Let him say his say,
Begin again and fire away.

BASIL

I started from uneasy slumber,
And heard night's stately tongue o'er-number
Twelve measured beats. While rang the last
I slept again; but ere it passed
In still-attenuating sound
I wakened from that sudden swoond.
A dream begotten by the bell,
Was born within its lingering knell.
The deep reverberation clung
About my spirit ; anguish wrung
My flesh ; the mortal veil was rent ;
And from the world's imprisonment,
And out of penitential Time

I soared into a ransomed clime.
The air was balmier than the west
That bends the barley's nodding crest,
When happy folk the greenwood seek,
And summer roasts the apple's cheek.
A darkness of another dye
Than earthly night o'erspread the sky
If any heaven were heaved on high :
The only light that guided me
My soul's enkindled radiancy.
The splendour that my spirit threw
Revealed new green, new golden dew
Wherein I saw new flowers encamp :
They glimmered in my silvery lamp
Like gems in an illumined grot :
I glided on ; my light waned not ;
Fresh wonders peered forth as I passed ;
Without me brooded darkness vast.

I

E

Among the branches of the trees
That trembled to the fingering breeze,
And far more softly sang and sighed
Than soft Æolian harps, I spied
Looks brighter than the liquid gold
That streams before the peal has rolled.
Notes sweeter than the nightingale's,
More piercing than the lowly rail's,
And wealthier than the gorgeous chime
The mocking-bird at coupling time
Re-rings again and o'er and o'er
In changes richer than before,
With ruffling throat and spiral motion—
The vortex of a whirling ocean,
Whose floods are seething music waves
Outwelling from his heart's glad caves—
Surged and re-surged about my sense,
That revelled in their vehemence.

A blackness then waylaid my soul,
Intense, unfrayed, a perfect whole :
My beams could not irradiate
This ebon front, this cloudy gate.
Far up I saw a shimmer dim,
Like that above a night-cloud's rim,
Left trailing by the long-sunk sun,
When half the summer-time is done :
It coped the high-reared dense black blind :
I wondered what might be behind ;
But when I pressed no step might be,
And yet between the wall and me,
The strange sward flower-strewn I could see.

Soon sang a voice ; and, strange to tell,
It was my own voice singing well
A new song that I cannot mind ;
Vanished at once the dense black blind ;

Far, wide, a rainbow heaven of light
Clouded a while my silly sight.

I saw a sky of purple gloom,
That glowed as from a Tyrian loom,
And blushing hills perfumed with heath,
And flower-decked valleys hung beneath,
Where water purled a signal noise,
Melodious, like an angel's voice.
And there were forests great and old,
The carpet of whose fertile mould
Was woven of ferns and lustrous flowers ;
And caves were there and pleasant bowers :
And rocks, immortally undressed,
That shone through many a loose green vest.
And in the sky, and on the hills,
And through the woods, and by the rills,
A host of lights of every hue,

And every shape lit up the view.
Some shone with blood-streaked glow of green
Like jasper ; the carnation sheen
Of sardonyx beamed bright and pale ;
And like a maiden's finger-nail
The hue of chalcedony gleamed ;
And some pale blue like jacinth seemed ;
And there were flames like chrysolites,
And rubies—gems that love delights
Beside the well-loved lips to shame ;
And there was many an emerald flame ;
And topazes and sapphires came,
And smouldering amethystine hues,
Like purple grapes where lights infuse
A glow of garden violets,
Or women's eyes love's sweet dew wets.

The flaming shapes for ever changed

As fixed they hung or widely ranged.
Like meteors some wide heaven spanned ;
Like wisps some shot about the land ;
And others moved their scrolls and curls,
Like waving skirts where lovely girls
Evolve from mazy minstrelsy
A moving silk-draped melody,
Dancing at the bridal-feast
Of some grand monarch of the east.
Transcending in magnificence,
In beauty, and in eloquence
Of movement, and in variance
Of shapely forms, and in the dance
The loftiest height with poise of state
Maintaining easily, elate
Above the others sailing far,
Now beaming like an opal star,
Now like the rainbow's shifting bridge

Wheeling from mountain ridge to ridge,
And now expanding like the dawn,
Now like the northern lights, there shone
A glorious flame ; and one bright form,
As grand in motion as a storm,
Exceeded symmetry. I knew
What these two were ; but memory grew
A jumbled chaos when I hoped
To seize their names. While yet I groped
Within the darkened lumber-room
Of memory, a sound did loom
Upon my hearing, which till then
Had been a hollow empty den,
Its sense being stolen into my sight
To give it power to grasp the light.
Eftsoons the looming sound, evolved
Whence I perceived not then, resolved
Its misty volume into dew,

That rose and fell and rose anew,
And showering gently seemed to bear
Odours from Cytherea's hair,
Or from the thousand flowers that please
The vigilant Hesperides
Within their bower on Atlas' top,
Whose shoulders huge the heavens prop,
So dulcet was the harmony.
It rained into my memory,
And, freshening that fallow mead,
Awakened many a sleeping seed
That sprang and blossomed into flower,
A bell for every happy hour.
But yet my wakening intuition
That longed to execute its mission,
To call those two supremest flames,
Bloomed not in flower of their names.
Oh me ! that airy melody !

Its memory distresses me,
Like old men's thoughts of love's first kiss,
Like damned imaginings of bliss.
No thrilling movement with me stays ;
The shadow of one subtle phrase
Cools not the burning of desire ;
Tears cannot quench that ardent fire ;
So sweet and low the voices sung,
So deep and high the singing swung,
Or, like the bird of heaven, hung
In joyous swoon, on brooding wing
Intensely, stilly, hovering.
Then far away across the vale
A sapphire sea with ripples pale
I saw : the golden, further shore
A group of wan lights wandered o'er
Hueless and shadowy : and I thought
That those the airy music wrought.

Sudden a great globe brimmed my sight,
And all my senses took their flight
To it to make it capable ;
I was one eye and it was full,
But can a brazier hold the sun,
Or any cup the ocean ?

MENZIES

None.

BASIL

This splendour, now in mist diffused,
Hung like a cloud of diamond-dust ;
Contracted to a point anon,
It still so luminously shone
Its dense light could be seen alone.
I was one eye, one questioning gaze :
At once the scintillating haze,

In answer to my inquisition
Appeared as two ; and each division
A shadowy human outline carried,
Less bright divided than when married.
Then straight the black gulf hung between
My aching sight and heaven's scene.

BRIAN

But this is nonsense triple-piled.

HERBERT

Is nonsense then to be reviled ?

MENZIES

Not so ; for fancy where it lists
Breathes like the wind : he who resists
His wanton moods for ever, ends
In being moodless.

BASIL

Good, my friends,
Forgive, forget. The dream was long,
Too long.—Let some one sing a song.

MENZIES

Your bass is rusty, Herbert ; come.

HERBERT

I'll sing a song of Harvest-home.

SONG

The frost will bite us soon ;
His tooth is on the leaves :
Beneath the golden moon
We bear the golden sheaves :
We care not for the winter's spite,
We keep our Harvest-home to-night.

Hurrah for the English yeoman !

Fill full, fill the cup !

Hurrah ! he yields to no man !

Drink deep ; drink it up !

The pleasure of a king,

Is tasteless to the mirth

Of peasants when they bring

The harvest of the earth.

With pipe and tabor hither roam

All ye who love our Harvest-home.

Hurrah for the English yeoman !

Fill full ; fill the cup !

Hurrah ; he yields to no man !

Drink deep ; drink it up !

The thresher with his flail,

The shepherd with his crook,

The milkmaid with her pail,
The reaper with his hook—
To-night the dullest blooded clods
Are kings and queens, are demigods.
Hurrah for the English yeoman !
Fill full ; fill the cup !
Hurrah ! he yields to no man !
Drink deep ; drink it up !

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S DAY

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S DAY

BASIL

SANDY

MENZIES

BASIL

A NOBLE fog! Though I
Were comfortably dead,
Shrouded and buried deep
In my last bed,
Tucked in for my long sleep,
Where generations lie,
I scarce were more at ease
Than now I feel beneath
This heavy-laden silent atmosphere.

I F

MENZIES

A kraken of the skies! Its teeth
 Are closing in my throat ;
 A lithe arm rummages
 Each aching lung.

SANDY

We dote

On your disaster, Menzies. { Here,
 Like people of Pompeii,
 Or like Saharan denizens,
 Sitting for centuries
 O'erwhelmed with sand or lava, we
 Are quite at home in fogs like these.

BASIL

And feel as if our tongues and pens
 Had wagged and scrawled since Arthur's time ;

And we had seen the best and worst
Of England's youth and England's prime ;
As if this day might be the first
Day of Elizabeth—
Or any day : the dead, like God,
Breathing eternal breath,
Can be in any period.

MENZIES

Alas, I cannot but remember
That this is London in November!

BASIL

Be out of London ; off!
Command your soul ; away,
Where woods their wardrobes doff
To give the wind free play.
Brocaded oak-trees wait,

Reluctant to undress ;
But the woods accept from Fate
Their lusty nakedness,
And with a many-armed caress
Welcome their stormy mate.

SANDY

Or where on rivers blacken
Close fleets of hurrying leaves.

BASIL

Or where with tawny bracken
A lonely moorland heaves.

SANDY

Where ribbed and spiny hedges
Hold fast the empty ear.

BASIL

Or where like summer's pledges
The ruddy hips appear.

SANDY

Where coal-black brambles shimmer.

BASIL

Where in the naked copse,
Gems in a charnel, glimmer
The nightshade's coral drops.

SANDY

Or where in twilight shaws
The dusky-glowing thorn,
Hides in its hoard of haws
The crimson of the morn.

BASIL

Where earth beholds the skies,
Or heaven looks on the sea,
Or where great mountains rise
Command your soul to be.

MENZIES

I may not; all my brains
Are baked and dried ; my veins
Shrunk and unflushed.

BASIL

Drink wine.

MENZIES

It steads not; moods like mine
Must run their courses out;
Nothing can put to rout
My gloom when I have swilled

Life's sadness to the lees;
Nepenthe may not ease,
Or nectar, heaven-distilled.

SANDY

Basil, tell us, pray,
Why you called the day
After the maiden queen ?

BASIL.

Three centuries away
The child of Anne Boleyn
Came to the English throne
Upon this very day.

MENZIES

Ah ! what a splendid age !
Then England's hope was high ;

The world was half unknown ;
And heaven and hell were nigh.
On such a glorious stage
I could have played a part
With other souls devout :
But the world is now a mart,
And all the earth found out.
Hesperia is no more !
From Himalayan vales
Our fathers sought its shore,
And lit on isles and dales
Of Greece and Arcady ;
But soon they set their sails
Sadly across the sea,
And came to Ætna's base ;
Yet by Sicilian ways
No dragon guarded tree
With golden apples grew.

Undauntedly they passed
The Tyrrhene waters blue,
And reached the Iberian strand—
Hesperia at last !
Not there the promised land.
Westward that vision old
Fled o'er the Atlantic main
To sink for ever, slain
By Californian gold.

BASIL

This is the promised land ;
God saw that it was good :
You fail to understand
That the world is but a mood,
And time ours to command.
This is the hour of doom,
Or this creation's morn

Or Calvary's day of gloom :
We die not ; were not born.

MENZIES

Ah, you anachronists !
You poets ! It is you,
With mellow purple mists
That shade the dreary view
Of life, a naked precipice
Overhanging death's deep sea.

SANDY

Anachronists ! I rest on this,
Whoe'er may count it schism :
Mere by-blows are the world and we,
And time within eternity
A sheer anachronism.

BASIL

A bull ! a thundering bull !

MENZIES

But not a blundering one ;

For Chance directs the sun,

And Fate is Fortune's fool.

✓ The world was scarcely made

Ere Chance began its trade

And changed to frozen poles

And spaces tropic-bound

What Fate created good ;

And soulless or with souls

Beasts grew each other's food ;

With floods all flesh was drowned ;

And foul diseases came ;

Earth issued forth in flame,

And swallowed cities up ;
Peoples and languages,
Kingdoms and hierarchies,
With wars and tortures rose :
Nay, our most bitter cup
For ever overflows
With rich and poor alone :
Chance has always spurned
Our struggles to atone.
Lo, in the simplest thing
The good is overturned,
Fate set aside with scorn !
The air is clear and sweet ;
But the fog is in the street :
In June the squares were green,
What dreary places now !
Ere we may greet the spring,
Must winter come again ;

And man may not be born
Without a woman's pain.

BASIL

But God has no machine
For punching perfect worlds from cakes of chaos.

SANDY

How!

BASIL

He works but as He can ;
God is an artist, not an artisan.
Darkly imagining,
With ice and fire and storm,
With floods and earthquake-shocks
He gave our sphere its form.
The meaning of His work
Grew as He wrought.

In creases of the mud, in cooling rocks
He saw ideas lurk—
Mountains and streams.
Of life the passionate thought
Haunted His dreams.
At last He tried to do
The thing He dreamt.
With plasm in throbbing notes,
With moss and ferns and giant beasts unkempt
He laboured long, until at length He seemed
To breathe out being. Flowers and forests grew
Like magic at His word : mountain and plain,
Jungle and sea and waste,
With miracles of strength and beauty teemed :
In every drop and every grain,
Each speck and stain,
Was some new being placed,
Minute or viewless. Then was He aghast,

And all His passion to create grew tame ;
For life batted on life. He thought
To shatter all; but in a space
He loved His work again and sought
To crown it with a sovereign grace;
And soon the great idea came.
' If I could give my work a mind;
If I could make it comprehend
How wondrously it is designed;
Enable it with head and heart
To mould itself to some accomplished end—
That were indeed transcendent art.'
Trembling with ecstasy He then made man,
To be the world's atonement and its prince.
And in the world God has done nothing since :
He keeps not tinkering at a finished plan;
He is an artist, not an artisan.

MENZIES

I've heard it sung, I've heard it said,
I've read it oft in many books,
That truth's as long as it is broad.
I like your dilettante God :
When man His work has perfected,
Straight God will blot it out again,
Or change it to a sterile moon,
Upon whose past shall speculate
Star-gazers from some brand-new land-and-sea.
And why should mortal man complain
Although no memory shall be
Of all the millions of his race,
Who broke brave hearts still fronting Fate ;
Although no rumour of Helen's looks,
Although no Cæsar's name of note,
No mellow word that Shakespeare wrote,

No echo of Wagner's spheral tune,
Shall sound in any nook of space ?
God is an artist, and all art
Is useless, other artists say.

SANDY

If God is art and art is God,
I fear I don't believe in God.

BASIL

That matters not since this is true—
Hear me before you go away,
And turn this over in your heart—
That God Himself believes in you.

11

CHRISTMAS EVE



CHRISTMAS EVE

BASIL

SANDY

BRIAN

MENZIES

SANDY

In holly hedges starving birds
Silently mourn the setting year.

BASIL

Upright like silver-plated swords
The flags stand in the frozen mere.

BRIAN

The mistletoe we still adore
Upon the twisted hawthorn grows.



MENZIES

In antique gardens hellebore
Puts forth its blushing Christmas rose.

SANDY

Shrivelled and purple, cheek by jowl,
The hips and haws hang drearily.

BASIL

Rolled in a ball the sulky owl
Creeps far into his hollow tree.

BRIAN

In abbeys and cathedrals dim
The birth of Christ is acted o'er;
The kings of Cologne worship Him,
Balthazar, Jasper, Melchior.

MENZIES

And while our midnight talk is made
Of this and that and now and then,
The old earth-stopper with his spade
And lantern seeks the fox's den.

SANDY

Oh, for a northern blast to blow
These depths of air that cream and curdle!

BASIL

Now are the halcyon days, you know ;
Old Time has leapt another hurdle ;
And pauses as he only may
Who knows he never can be caught.

BRIAN

The winter solstice, shortest day
And longest night, was past, I thought.

BASIL

Oh yes! but fore-and-aft a week
Silent the winds must ever be,
Because the happy halcyons seek
Their nests upon the sea.

BRIAN

The Christmas-time! the lovely things
That last of it! Sweet thoughts and deeds!

SANDY

How strong and green old legend clings
Like ivy round the ruined creeds!

MENZIES

A fearless, ruthless, wanton band,
Deep in our hearts we guard from scathe,
Of last year's log, a smouldering brand
To light at Yule the fire of faith.

BRIAN

The shepherds in the field at night

Beheld an angel glory-clad,

And shrank away with sore affright.

'Be not afraid,' the angel bade.

'I bring good news to king and clown,

To you here crouching on the sward ;

For there is born in David's town

A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

'Behold the babe is swathed, and laid

Within a manger.' Straight there stood

Beside the angel all arrayed

A heavenly multitude.

'Glory to God,' they sang; 'and peace,

Good pleasure among men.'

SANDY

The wondrous message of release,
That forged another chain !

BRIAN

Nay, nay; God help us to be good !

BASIL

Hush ! hark ! Without ; the waits, the waits !
With brass and strings, and mellow wood.

MENZIES

A simple tune can ope heaven's gates

SANDY

Slowly they play, poor careful souls,
With wistful thoughts of Christmas cheer,
Unwitting how their music rolls
Away the burden of the year.

BASIL

And with the charm, the homely rune,
To early moods our minds incline,
As when our pulses beat in tune
With all the stars that shine.

MENZIES

Oh cease ! oh cease !

BASIL

Ay, cease ; and bring
The wassail-bowl, the cup of grace.

SANDY

Pour wine, and heat it till it sing.
With cloves and cardamums and mace.

BASIL

And frothed and sweetened round it goes,
The while we drink the whole world's health.

SANDY

The whole world's health ! But chiefly those
Who grasp the whole world's power and wealth.

BRIAN

I drink the poor in spirit ; theirs
Is heaven's kingdom.

SANDY

Theirs, below,
A bursting granary of tares,
Derision, contumely, woe.

BRIAN

To those who patiently have borne
Sorrow !

SANDY

May joy come soon instead !

I drink the health of those that mourn
And never can be comforted.

BRIAN

I drink the meek.

SANDY

I drink their foes,
The ruthless heirs of all the earth—
The knaves, the pushing men, and those
Who claim prerogatives of birth.

BRIAN

I drink the merciful, for they
Shall mercy gain.

SANDY

From usurers?

BRIAN

The pure in heart, and those who pray
And work for peace when faction stirs,

I drink ; and all whom men condemn
For righteousness, who never shrink
From persecution.

SANDY

Yes, to them !

To every sinner too, I drink !

BASIL

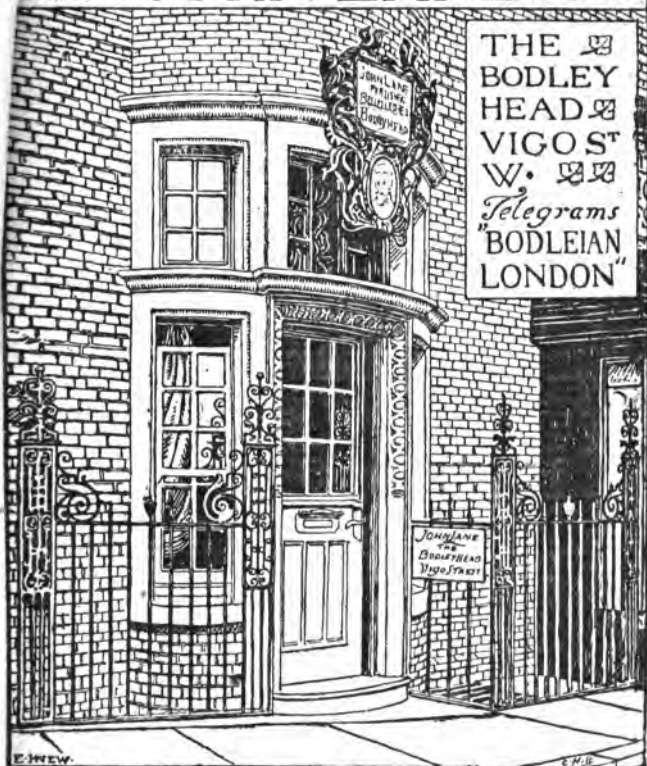
Hush ! hark ! the waits, far up the street !

MENZIES

A new, unearthly charm unfolds
Of magic music wild and sweet,
Anomes and clarigolds !

THE END

JOHN LANE



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